

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

The following listing of claims supersedes all prior versions and listings of claims in this application:

1-72. (Cancelled)

73. (New) An adaptive overload control method for controlling the amount of traffic offered by a plurality of network access points to a network access controller for processing, the plurality of network access points being arranged under control of said network access controller to provide said traffic with access to a communications network, the method enabling said network access controller to externally control the amount of traffic which it processes by regulating the rate of offered traffic, the method comprising:

(a) at the network access controller using at least one programmed processor to:

determine if an overload condition exists, and if so,

(i) generate at least one global constraint to restrict the rate at which a network access point admits said traffic to the communications network; and

- (ii) communicate said at least one global traffic constraint to one or more of said plurality of network access points; and
- (b) at each respective network access point receiving said at least one global traffic constraint, using at least one programmed processor to:
 - (i) process the received global traffic constraint to determine a plurality of local gap interval constraint conditions for the respective network access point by:
 - determining a local gap interval (Δt) to be imposed on traffic received by said respective network access point; and
 - determining an initial local gap interval (Δt_0) which differs from the determined local gap interval (Δt), wherein each initial local gap interval (Δt_0) is determined independently by each respective ones of said plurality of network access points to be between zero and the local gap interval (Δt) for said respective network access point; and
 - (ii) impose said local initial gap interval (Δt_0) at each of said plurality of network access points directly responsive to receipt of a global gap condition and before further traffic is received at the respective network access point for admittance to said communications network.

74. (New) A method as claimed in claim 73, wherein said traffic comprises communications call-related traffic.

75. (New) A method as claimed in claim 73, wherein the network access controller analyses the rate at which traffic is offered to the network access controller to determine said at least one global traffic constraint.

76. (New) A method as claimed in claim 73, wherein the network access controller determines if an overload condition exists at the network access controller from the aggregate rate at which traffic is offered by all of said plurality of network access points to said network access controller, and wherein said at least one global constraint is derived from said aggregate offered traffic rate.

77. (New) A method as claimed in claim 73, wherein the network access controller analyses the rate at which traffic is rejected by the controller to determine said at least one global traffic constraint.

78. (New) A method as claimed in claim 77, wherein the network access controller determines if an overload condition exists at the network access controller from a reject rate comprising a rate at which the traffic offered by all of said plurality of

network access points to said network access controller is rejected, and wherein said at least one global constraint is derived from the reject rate.

79. (New) A method as claimed in claim 74, wherein said network access controller determines said at least one global traffic constraint by analyzing the rate at which off-hook signalling messages are rejected by the network access controller.

80. (New) A method as claimed in claim 73, wherein the aggregate distribution of intervals imposed by all of said network access points under the control of the network access controller is randomized at the onset of the local gap interval (Δt) constraint imposed by each said network access point.

81. (New) A method as claimed in claim 80, wherein said randomization is imposed individually by each network access point generating an initial local gap interval (Δt_0) whose duration is determined by a random process.

82. (New) A method as claimed in claim 80, wherein said randomization is imposed individually by each network access point implementing said local gap interval (Δt) constraint immediately following processing of the global constraint information received, and wherein the time for the global constraint information processing to be

completed following the network access controller generating said global constraint information varies for each of said plurality of network access points.

83. (New) A method as claimed in claim 73, wherein in said step of communicating said at least one global traffic constraint to one or more of said plurality of network access points, at least one global traffic constraint is multicast to one or more of said plurality of network access points.

84. (New) A method as claimed in claim 73, wherein the initial local gap interval (Δt_0) is determined at each network access point using a random or pseudo-random technique.

85. (New) A method as claimed in claim 79, wherein said communications network is a VoIP network, and said traffic comprises call-related traffic.

86. (New) A method as claimed in claim 79, wherein said network access controller is a Media Gateway Controller and each of said plurality of network access points comprises a Media Gateway.

87. (New) A method as claimed in claim 73, wherein a global traffic rate constraint is determined by said network access controller for an address.

88. (New) A method as claimed in claim 73, wherein the number of lines along which a network access point receives traffic for transmission across the communications network and a scalable gap interval determined by the network access controller based on the aggregate traffic offered to the network access controller by all contributing network access points are used to determine said local gap interval (Δt).

89. (New) A method as claimed in claim 73, wherein a dial-plan is implemented by a network access point to make it unnecessary to send an off-hook condition message to the network access controller when a local gap interval (Δt) constraint is being imposed.

90. (New) A method as claimed in claim 73, wherein each network access point determines the initial gap interval (Δt_0) using a probabilistic method.

91. (New) A method as claimed in claim 73, wherein the initial gap interval (Δt_0), if not zero, is determined by each network access point such that all of the

network access points' initial gap intervals (Δt_0) are uniformly distributed in the range from zero to the local gap interval (Δt) determined by each network access point.

92. (New) An adaptive overload control system for controlling the amount of traffic offered by a plurality of network access points to a network access controller for processing, the plurality of network access points being arranged under control of said network access controller to provide said traffic with access to a communications network, the system enabling said network access controller to externally control the amount of traffic which it processes by regulating the rate of offered traffic, the system comprising:

- (a) at the network access controller:
 - (i) means for determining if an overload condition exists;
 - (ii) means responsive to the determination that an overload condition exists for generating at least one global constraint to restrict the rate at which a network access point admits said traffic to the communications network; and
 - (iii) means for communicating said at least one global traffic constraint to one or more of said plurality of network access points, and
- (b) at each respective network access point:
 - (i) means for receiving said at least one global traffic constraint;

(ii) means for processing the received global traffic constraint to determine a plurality of local gap interval constraint conditions for the respective network access point by:

determining a local gap interval (Δt) to be imposed on traffic received by said respective network access point; and

determining an initial local gap interval (Δt_0) which differs from the determined local gap interval (Δt), wherein each initial local gap interval (Δt_0) is determined independently by each respective ones of said plurality of network access points to be between zero and the local gap interval (Δt) for said respective network access point; and

(iii) means for imposing said local initial gap interval (Δt_0) at said respective network access points directly responsive to receipt of a global gap condition and before further traffic is received at the respective network access point for admittance to said communications network.